

Transcultural identities in the poems of Philippe Jaccottet and Ted Hughes

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For someone who is familiar with the poems of Ted Hughes, reading Philippe Jaccottet's brings about a sense of déjà-vu which is more than merely accidental. They are contemporaries: Jaccottet was born in 1925 and is therefore only five years older than Hughes. Both lead a country life, and this is closely related to the poetry they write. Hughes' *Moortown Diary* and *Moortown* are very comparable to Jaccottet's *Cahier de verdure* and *La Semailson*, as the traces of everyday poetry-making lives, and his *Requiem* is very evocative of Hughes' so-called war poems published in various collections. The Irishman Derek Mahon, who translated some of Jaccottet's poems into English went so far as to write that "there is even, I think, something (though he himself might be startled by the idea), something 'English' in his mode of perception" (Mahon 7). Both are nature poets, in the sense that nature is at once their main theme and the major source of their inspiration. Now, as it is, this is such a commonplace that it would not be worth noticing, were it not for the similarity of vision that it opens out on. Before undertaking to show the proximity of their deeper convictions, and what common grounds they tread, it might be interesting to single out a few examples, in a very empirical, bird's-eye-view sort of way, of surface similarities in their poems.

Here is a series of titles of poems or collections which belong to the universe of one poet as well as to that of the other. Compare Jaccottet's *L'effraie* (*The Screech Owl*), *À la lumière d'hiver* (*Winter Light*), *Les cormorans* (*The Cormorants*), "Vérité, non-vérité" ("Truth, Untruth"), "Oiseaux, fleurs, fruits" ("Birds, Flowers, Fruits"), "Martinets" ("Swifts"), "La terre toute entière visible" ("The Earth entirely visible"), "Pommes éparses" ("Strewn Apples"), "Aube" ("Dawn"), "Arbres" ("Trees"), to Hughes' "The Owl," "The Trance of Light," "A Cormorant," "Truth kills everybody," *Flowers and Insects*, "Swifts,"

"I said goodbye to earth," "Apple Dumps," "He Gets Up in Dark Dawn," "Trees." Not only does that show comparable subject matters, but also a common descriptive poetic approach –

what Hughes called "verses of simple observation" (1). Both poets are, in the beginning of their intellectual adventures at least, what Jaccottet calls "benign seers" (2), self-effacingly seeking empathy with the natural world.

Their texts themselves, as well as their selected objects of inspiration are often strikingly alike, as for example this note for a poem by Jaccottet – "Corbeau montant d'un vol oblique et patient devant les nuages roses de l'aube" (*La Semaïson* 209) (3) which creates a very similar impression, although more tersely, to Hughes' "Dawn's Rose" (*Crow* 59). Or else, the poem beginning "Et moi maintenant tout entier dans la cascade céleste" (*À la lumière d'hiver* 32), evokes the same sense of deadly all-mightiness as Hughes's "Hawk Roosting" (*Lupercal* 26). "Toi cependant" (33) is a prayer addressed to a character kindred to "Littleblood" (*Crow* 94) – "Invisible habitant l'invisible" – "little boneless little skinless."

Sometimes, a phrase sounds like a direct echo from one language to another. Thus, for instance, this "autre chose de plus caché, mais de plus proche ... Ombres calmes, buissons tremblant à peine" (*À la lumière d'hiver* 86) – "Something more near/Though deeper within darkness ... a lame/shadow lags by stump and in hollow" (*The Hawk in the Rain* 15) which the poets strain their ears to tune in to beneath the surface of things. Or else, the song of the lark they both hear as a paradoxical message, impossible to understand, "comme de petits anges effrénés, de petits ouvriers acharnés, sans autre outil que leur voix jubilante ou désespérée, on n'aurait su le dire)" (*Cahier de verdure* 42) – "O song, incomprehensibly both ways/Joy! Help! Joy! Help!/O lark" (*Wodwo* 169). And again, the word that for Jaccottet the buzzard is slowly tracing as it flies, and which the air instantly rubs out – "le mot que la buse trace lentement, très haut,/si l'air l'efface, n'est-ce pas celui que nous pensions/ne plus pouvoir entendre" (*À la lumière d'hiver* 135) – is the same invisible hieroglyph that for Hughes the gnats are "Dancing/Writing on the air, rubbing out everything they write/jerking their letters into knots, into tangles" (*Wodwo* 179).

Both poets indeed strive to read natural landscapes for signs of a presence. That is the meaning of Jaccottet's sequence of poems – "Leçons" – to be understood not as lessons,

1. Hughes, quoted by Sagar (*The Art of Ted Hughes* 243).

2. "Les voyeurs bénins abandonnés à leur mélancolique obsession, verra-t-on plus clair qu'ils ne l'on fait ? Faudra-t-il, pour cela, plus d'attention ou plus d'insouciance ? Plus ou moins de détours ? Sûrement, plus d'ingénuité" (Jaccottet, *Après beaucoup d'années* 17).

3. "Crow soaring, aslant and patient before the rosy clouds of dawn" (*La Semaïson* 209).

but as readings from the book of things – "le livre des choses, le livre du vécu, le livre concret matériel, douloureux, dérobé" (*La Semaïson* 186). Of course, their natural sites of reference differ, though only as North Yorkshire and the South-East of France can do. The Irishman Derek Mahon, who has translated some of Jaccottet's poems, notes with a touch of regret that in nature as the Swiss-born poet sees it, "There is (almost) no sea: this is an inland poetry of river and mountain, the/country road, the lake and the woods" (13-14). It is true that Jaccottet is rather a mountain walker, with a visual, panoramic, contemplative view of nature, whereas

Hughes is rather an angler, with therefore a more sensual, tactile, predatory insight. And Jaccottet's river, a flaming mountain torrent (4), although different from Hughes' apparently more sedate streams, is also one of his privileged sites of inspiration. They would certainly agree that "It is a god, and inviolable./Immortal. And will wash itself of all deaths" (*River* 74).

Both poetic works tend to focus on encounters with animals, or with natural events or scenes in which the poets see some forms of revelation. Either reading it in the rocks, the clouds, a tree, or hearing it in the cries of birds and the gurgle of rivers, these poets hear voices, have visions, catch enigmatic signs in the world. "Même sous les rochers de l'air sont des passages,/entre lavande et vigne filent des messages" (*Poésie* 1946-1967 77).

Their poetic work is a quest for what is, outside reality as we see it – "L'inconnu, le tout autre" (*À travers un verger* 32)! "C'est le Tout-autre que l'on cherche à saisir" (*La Semaïson* 39). That is what Mircea Eliade called the *ganz andere* (102), and its manifestation are what Keith Sagar, borrowing the word from Eliade, first identified in Hughes' poems as hierophanies (210). This latter word implies equating this other real with the sacred, an equation which both poets make without any hesitation. " 'Sacred'," Keith Sagar writes, "means nothing more nor less than 'real'. To see something as real, in all its fullness of being, is to recognize it as a manifestation of the sacred, a hierophany" (*The Art of Ted Hughes* 210). And Jaccottet speaks of "ce qui vous arrête, mais sans vous héler, au passage. Signes d'un autre monde, trouées" (*À travers un verger* 11). Both speak of echos from remote events and ceremonies – "(Ainsi arrive-t-il au promeneur égaré de surprendre une cérémonie sauvage et incompréhensible)" (*Cahier de verdure* 40). "Une fête lointaine, sous des arceaux de feuilles. À distance, à toujours plus grande distance" (*Cahier de verdure* 15). "In the end, one's poems are ragged dirty undated letters from remote battles and weddings and one thing and another" (Faas 205).

4. "Torrent : ce qui brûle. Comme si la chose la plus fraîche pouvait être une flamme, un instant, entre deux mondes" (*Après beaucoup d'années* 89). Jaccottet likes to insist on the etymology of the word torrent, from *torrere*, to bum.

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There is a divergence, however. Jaccottet voices doubts, which Hughes does not have, or refuses to have. Although his poetry obviously bears sincere witness to insistent and reiterated revelation, or, as he puts it, "encounter" – "rencontre" (*À travers un verger* 13), his prose denounces that taking the sound of the torrent for a voice with a meaning as irrational, or even unreasonable: "Pourtant, que je ne l'oublie pas : ce n'est pas une voix, malgré les apparences, ce n'est pas une parole ; ce n'est pas "de la poésie" ... C'est l'eau qui bouscule les pierres et j'y aurai trempé mes mains (*Après beaucoup d'années* 88).

This must be French rationalism crowing (5). But such misgivings are not often given vent to in his writings, and that sounds more like a sop to Cerberus than a very serious problem. The delicate balance between the Unknown and the Rational tips rather decisively on the dark side: "these lures, he goes on thinking obstinately, are too beautiful to be but lure" (6). In fact, he soon comes round with a consideration that brings him back to common ground with Hughes again – "L'invisible, en ces eaux, par quoi elles touchent ce que j'aurais en moi d'invisible" (*Après beaucoup d'années* 89). That would mean that for him too, the inner world of the unconscious can vibrate in sympathy with the outer world of nature, without any solution of

continuity. That brings him to sharing Hughes' view of the world, according to which

[But] the outer world is only one of the worlds we live in. For better or worse we have another, and that is the inner world of our bodies and everything pertaining. It is closer than the outer world, more decisive, and utterly different. So here are two worlds which we have to live in simultaneously. ("Myth and Education" [1976] 85)

Eventually, he comes to thinking in similar terms when he writes that "Ainsi deux mondes se lient-ils l'un à l'autre, se relaient-ils mutuellement" (*À travers un verger* 69). And he defines these moments of ecstatic revelation as being moments or points of contact or overlapping of those two worlds. "On dirait qu'on a changé de monde sans quitter celui-ci" (*La Semaïson* 255). And this he locates in a "zone off limits" (sic) which he calls "ce lieu impossible" (*Éléments d'un songe* 147) –, both inside and outside this time and space, saying: "Si c'était le 'voile du Temps' qui se déchire,/la 'cage du corps' qui se brise,/si c'était 'l'autre naissance' (*À la lumière d'hiver* 25)? Thus he defines a continuous space between inner and outer worlds, which is only virtually present.

5. "En moi se contrarient le sens de l'inconnu et un certain rationalisme" (*La Semaïson* 156).

6. "Ces leurres si beaux qu'ils vous enlèvent le sommeil? Trop beaux pourtant, continue-t-il presque maniaquement à penser, pour n'être que des leurres" (*Cahier de verdure* 17).

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in Hughes' work, and which Jaccottet calls the *Weltinnenraum*, or the "angelic space," borrowing the word from Rilke, whose poems he translated into French.

As a matter of fact, all this has more or less vaguely something to do with religion. For, when there is a revelation of some sort, there needs be some incipient theology lying in wait. Or, as Jaccottet puts it, "one smells a reek of old gods" (7). Now, paradoxically enough, the first thing he notices about ancient gods, is that they are missing, and about the Christian God, that He is dead, or all but so: "et certains disent avec soulagement qu'il est mort. Dieu qui n'est plus qu'un souvenir de Dieu, sans force, sans autorité" (*Éléments d'un songe* 77). Then, amending his first appreciation, he identifies them as "remote, deaf, dumb, averted, runaway deities" (8). These *dei otiosi* correspond to Hughes' idea that "the luminous spirit (maybe it is a crowd of spirits), that takes account of everything and gives everything its meaning, is missing. Not missing, just incommunicado" (Faas 190).

The two poets stand in a comparable situation relatively to Christian religion. Jaccottet says he "was driven away from religion by Protestantism, such as it was imposed on him in his childhood in Switzerland". And although Hughes never makes any such direct statement as to his personal life, he seems to remember his Methodist upbringing, in a rather unfavourable light, if one may trust it to these lines of "Mount Zion" – "Women bleak as Sunday rose-gardens/Or crumpling to puff-pastry, and cobwebbed with deaths./Men in their prison-yard, at attention,/Exercising their cowed, shaven souls" (*Remains of Elmet* 82). Jaccottet, however, is in no way so definitely anti-Christian as Hughes, and his unsanctified vision of Christ as "ce pitoyable Pendu couvert de sang" (*Éléments d'un songe* 114) has certainly nothing to do with the aggression of Hughes' "His patience had meaning only for him/Like the sanguine upside-

down grin/Of a hanging half-pig" (*Moortown* 156).

Reflecting on his lack of faith in the conventional, Christian sense of the term (10), but unable to believe in the actual death of God either, Jaccottet comes to a very interesting notion. He thinks that in fact it is no longer possible, or useful, to name God and to call on

7. "On sent un remugle de vieux dieux" (*À la lumière d'hiver* 22).

8. "La seule grâce à demander aux dieux lointains, aux dieux muets, aveugles, détournés,/à ces fuyards,/ne serait-elle pas que toute larme répandue/sur le visage proche/dans l'invisible terre fit germer/un blé inépuisable?" (*À la lumière d'hiver* 93).

9. "J'ai été éloigné de la religion par le protestantisme, tel qu'il vous était imposé dans mon enfance, en Suisse" ("Les paysages de Philippe Jaccottet" 4).

10. "Je m'aperçois alors que cette forme de croyance non seulement m'est étrangère, mais me paraît incompréhensible" (*La Semaïson* 150-1).

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him, not so much because God is dead, but because His figure and His name have been destroyed." He then suggests to call this nameless Deity "l'Insaississable" – the Elusive One – or "le Silencieux" – the Silent One – (*Éléments d'un songe* 165). In other words, he considers that God is now pure Spirit, refined out of reach of images and of human language, remaining real only by His absence. "Maintenant, Dieu est vraiment esprit, et absolument hors d'atteinte des images, sinon négatives. Maintenant, Dieu ne peut même plus s'appeler Dieu" (*La Semaïson* 41). And the question that remains pending for him is whether there can be a cult of the Nameless, and what is the relation of this Silent One with the Word. "Peut-il y avoir une parole du Silencieux, un culte du Sans nom" (*Éléments d'un songe* 166) ?

This amounts to saying that his inability to believe in, or say, his lack of comfort with the Christian God and the Christian religion is counterbalanced by what could be called his poetic revelation. He says he can hear the steps of a god, the breathing of a god, in a moment of great inner silence – "le pas d'un dieu, la respiration d'un dieu entendus dans un moment de grand silence intérieur" (*Éléments d'un songe* 136) –, a faraway presence which seems to be giving supreme order to the world and to be coming from a remote ceremony – "je me risque à comparer ce sourd battement, ce pas léger de l'Insaississable et cette belle ordonnance à ce qui aurait pu me parvenir d'une fête ou cérémonie très lointaine" (139).

It is noteworthy that this deity is referred to as 'a god,' definitely alien to, and outside the bonds of, human language. It is a remote, impregnable beauty, an unknown light, always bearing another name than that one was about to give it – "Une beauté lointaine, imprenable, une lumière inconnue. Portant toujours un autre nom que celui qu'on s'apprêtait à lui donner" (*À travers un verger* 11). And this is at once a presence revealed in the contemplation of nature, and a "*Deus interior intimo meo*" (*La Semaïson* 42), a godhead felt in the depths of the poet's soul.

This reflection on God has been approached so far through the poet's theoretical prose. But, very strangely, there appears in his poetry what must be termed another deity, since it is given another grammatical gender; it is feminine, and it is a She who, like Robert Graves' White Goddess or Hughes' Goddess of Complete Being, belongs to earth and the realm of the dead.

11. "Le temps serait-il venu où il est vraiment impossible, inutile de nommer Dieu, donc aussi bien de se confier à lui, de se réfugier en lui, mais non point parce qu'il serait mort, au contraire: parce que son nom seul et sa figure seraient détruits, ne laissant plus paraître derrière eux que ce qui, pour être innommable, n'en est pas moins, pour nous, réel, présent par son absence : celui que j'appellerais donc l'Insaissable, en sachant que c'est encore trop dire, ou le Silencieux" (*Éléments d'un songe* 165).

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Je l'ai vue droite et parée de dentelles

...

Elle est déjà comme sa propre pierre
avec dessus les pieuses et vaines fleurs éparses
et pas de nom: oh pierre mal aimée
profond dans l'aubier du cœur.
(*À la lumière d'hiver* 37)

This is none other than the nameless gravestone of *Gaudete* which the priestess Maud honors:

Maud stands at the foot of the last grave.
A round shouldered stone.
She sticks the blossoming twigs into the perforations of the green pot on the
grave.
The black stone is bare, except for birds droppings
And a lonely engraved word:
Gaudete. (94)

As with Hughes, this animal sister – "l'animale sœur" (*À la lumière d'hiver* 60) – is expressly identified as the Mother. This becomes very clear in such poems as, for example "Tu m'as portée au jour, tu t'es déchirée" (*La Semaïson* 77-8). By definition, she inhabits an impossible, forbidden *Weltinnenraum*, from which she is always indistinct. She is one with the earth, and is sometimes called the weaver – "la tisserande" (*À la lumière d'hiver* 110)

for her pertaining to the world as to a biological tissue, "encore moins distincte de ses boucles, de ses dentelles/que l'onduleuse vague ne l'est de l'écume (60).

As with Hughes again, she is a dangerous, violent entity, compared to a wild beast "le fauve souple" (60), but with this difference, though, that her ambivalent nature is only recognized in an allusive sort of way, and never really acknowledged. Jaccottet obviously does not share Hughes' fascination with death, which is manifest in the poems of the "Epilogue" of *Gaudete*, or in *Cave Birds*. On the contrary, death and the thought of death fill Jaccottet with Angst, and a sort of petrifying disgust, much like Philip Larkin, in a way. And what he calls "the breath of the foul snout" – "le souffle de l'immonde groin" (*Poésie* 1946-1967 79) – is never seen as being in any way related to the mysterious beauty of the visions – "la beauté qui reste à mes yeux un mystère (*Une transaction secrète* 333). In other words, Jaccottet never really makes out Hughes' "Tragic Equation" (*Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being*). While Robert Graves wrote that "the function of poetry is

religious invocation of the Muse; its use is the experience of mixed exaltation and horror that her presence excites" (14), Jaccottet never actually mixes exaltation with horror. A good illustration of this difference is found in comparing Hughes' poem "Waving goodbye, from your banked hospital bed" (*Gaudete* 185-6) with Jaccottet's "La Ioggia vide" (*Après beaucoup d'années* 69-73). Both texts tell of an interview of the poet with a dead woman in a morgue. But where Hughes evokes a Greek marble statue, Jaccottet sees only a waxen body which no longer has anything to do with the beauty he knew. However, one may see a revealing intuition in the fact that he chooses to call the horror he feels "l'innommable," again and again – the very same word he selected to mention the nameless god lost in the grass – "Dieu perdu dans l'herbe" (*Éléments d'un songe* 161-174).

Not surprisingly, whether in one of these poetical works or the other, the theological question is closely related to that of the name, and therefore to the issue of language. With perceptible relief, Derek Mahon congratulated Jaccottet for not being one of those recent French poets who have committed "de la poésie illisible," saying that "unlike many French poets, he is not greatly troubled by the disjunction between the signifying word and the thing signified" (Mahon 7). And indeed, he has written that he had the confused feeling that this opposition between words and things had to be overcome (12). But, be it as it may, the deity which is central to his poetic experience and work is precisely what he himself defines as being alien to any form, name or image, and basically impossible to submit to the laws of words –

c'est ce qui n'a ni forme ni visage, ni aucun nom,
ce qu'on ne peut apprivoiser dans les images
heureuses ni soumettre aux lois des mots,
ce qui déchire la page
comme cela déchire la peau,
ce qui empêche de parler en autre langue que de bête.
(*À la lumière d'hiver* 44)

Indeed, both Hughes and Jaccottet have for a poetic horizon something which lies beyond the pale of words. And when Jaccottet says that it is what prevents one from speaking in any other language than that of the beasts, he merely touches upon an obsession which preoccupied Hughes for quite a long time, and in a very seminal way, when he tried

12. "J'ai le sentiment confus qu'il faut dépasser cette opposition entre mots et choses" (*À travers un verger* 21).

to invent the language – but it was rather the anti-language – of Orghast. In that impossible animal language, that "langue de bête," "the very words themselves embodied, in vocal form, the experiences they described" (Smith 39). Not so Jaccottet, who, perhaps because he is a

professional translator and therefore has a different approach to languages, does indeed consider "language is a given, and suffices for his purpose" (Mahon 7), "Parce que nous n'avons qu'une langue d'hommes" (*À travers un verger* 78). But he nevertheless follows a quieter road which, though it may seem to lead the other way round at first, does eventually head towards the same Rome. He simply attempts to refuse metaphor. "Refus de la métaphore, par souci de ne pas trahir une plus mystérieuse simplicité" (*La Semaïson* 201). To him, it seems to mean the same thing as avoiding images – "Méfie-toi des images" (*À travers un verger* 17). And this amounts to exactly the same poetic project as Hughes', since it means denying the inadequacy of language, and refusing to make allowances for the unbridgeable gap between words and things. With Jaccottet, this attempt to start from scratch – "À partir du rien. Là est ma loi. Tout le reste, fumée lointaine" (*La Semaïson* 56) it leads into exactly the same cul-de-sac as with Hughes' Orghast, unpublished to this day unless we consider that the poems of *Prometheus On His Crag* are its translation into our stammering, broken-voiced language of men, "nous les bègues à la voix brisée" (*À la lumière d'hiver* 130). "I find it difficult to renounce images," writes Jaccottet "J'ai de la peine à renoncer aux images" (*Poésie* 1946-1967 37) (13).

J'ai relevé les yeux.

Derrière la fenêtre,
au fond du jour,
des images quand même passent.

Navettes ou anges de l'être,
elles réparent l'espace.
(*À la lumière d'hiver* 28)

In his poetry, however, there remains the same ascetic drive towards reformed simplicity, so strongly felt in Hughes' poetry, and which he explained concerning Crow, saying those were, "songs with no music whatsoever, in a super-simple and a super-ugly language which would in a way shed everything except just what he wanted to say without any other consideration" ("Ted Hughes and *Gaudete*"). Jaccottet speaks of

13. See Miñano and Roudaut.

destroying all poetic comfort – "Détruire tout confort poétique" (*La Semaïson* 208). And there remains a concise, down-to-earth style of poetry with the Japanese hai-ku for an ideal (see *Une transaction secrète* 329).

But there is more to this question of the refusal of images, and this where the greatest divergence between these two poets can be found. In "Vers le 'vrai lieu' (*L'Entretien des muses* 249-257), Jaccottet reproaches Bonnefoy with subscribing too visibly to "myth" and to "certain mythologies." Now, it seems indeed that 'If he did turn back from his refusal of metaphor and of images, he did not – or did not wish to – come to terms with "myth" or "mythology." He clearly is rather wary not to indulge in myth, as if myth could be more or less equated with "an excess of solemnity" or "an excess of generalization" (256). Perhaps this is

one theoretical explanation for the reader's feeling that his poetry stops short of breaking through to making the assessments it ceaselessly and repeatedly drives at. One capital difference between him and Hughes lies precisely in this, that Hughes not only does not refuse myth, but has understood it, very early in his work indeed, as what it is, namely not merely, as Greek etymology could seem to have it, a lie, but on the contrary, a more powerful order of language. Demonstrably, myth for Hughes is poetic language with extra meaning.

Paradoxically again, Jaccottet presents as a desirable future achievement the setting up of a "sacred geography" (*La Semaïson* 270) which Hughes has undertaken quite a few years ago, and has at least partly completed already. Besides, in several penetrating insights, Jaccottet cannot help but make some mytho-poetic breakthroughs which Hughes would doubtlessly subscribe to as well. The issue is rich enough for a much wider study than this, but a few examples, once again, may suffice to convince. Singing to his earthly deity, Jaccottet writes:

Tu as été renversée, tu l'es encore, par une puissance inverse, ainsi que le vide
s'oppose au plein, la glace au feu.

Qui t'a ainsi maltraitée ? Tu étais un feu parfumé, maintenant tu es cassée et
tremblante, on va te jeter avec les déchets, te cacher dans la terre. Ta beauté
égarait l'esprit; l'horreur de ta fin, il ne peut même pas la supporter à distance, en
pensée.

(*La Semaïson* 78)

This elementary story, this very short myth, telling of the overthrowing of a feminine deity by an opposite power, and her subsequent hiding into the earth, switching her from beauty to horror, is precisely the story of the antagonism between Moa and

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Krogon which may be found at the beginning of the mythology of Orghast, and which lies at the root of Hughes' dualistic writings and of the theory he develops in *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being*.

For another example, in *Cahier de verdure* (12) there is a description of an ecstatic revelatory vision of a great, fruit-bearing cherry-tree, whose fruits are like a "grape of red in a cradle of green leaves," which is acknowledged as a "metamorphic" appearance of "another world," compared to a "door turning on its hinges." And immediately, as this description soon misses its object, and as the vision slips metonymically under the words that try to catch it, the tree metamorphoses in quick succession into blood, fire, light, heat, wild beast, opening in the earth, flame, dead leaves, small wind-shaken trees, foxes, grapes and finally fire married to water, and night. This can be compared to such poems by Hughes as "I see the oak's bride in the oak's grasp" (*Gaudete* 183-184), and be identified as what he calls a "theophany" (*Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* 162)," that is to say, simply, a manifestation (phanein) of the divine (*theos*). And the polymorphism of this hypostasis, that is to say, in good English, the fact that this godly apparition takes many forms, is something which is familiar to Hughes (87, etc.), and which is not surprising for a deity defined as alien to metaphor and images, which are therefore all inadequate to name what could be called a trans-natural entity.

One last instance may be worth mentioning for its emblematic simplicity. It is well known that

the dove is one favorite bird with Hughes, who included it in his personal emblem for the Rainbow Press. And Jaccottet notes in a recent interview that the dove is the first symbolic bird in his books, whereas the others usually are, he says, real birds whom he knows very well – "Ainsi la colombe est le premier oiseau qui soit chargé de symbole dans mes livres, alors que d'habitude ce sont de vrais oiseaux, que je connais très bien" ("Les paysages de Philippe Jaccotte" 4). It would certainly make a fitting emblem, for Jaccottet is undeniably a poet of an extremely gentle, modest and prudent temper. The poetic stance he favours is one of self-effacement" – "L'effacement soit ma façon de resplendir" (*Poésie 1946-1967* 76) and myth-making is undoubtedly a far too boisterous sort of sport for him. His way does not have the powerful intellectual self-confidence of Hughes', and he is rather striving to lead a life from which poetry could rise, or be given as a grace, whereas with Hughes this is rather a matter of hard work and stamina. However, Jaccottet's remarkable poetic persona is much akin to Hughes' in the "Epilogue" of *Gaudete*, or the to tramp of "November" (*Lupercal* 49-50) who puts his trust in nature – he is the ignoramus, "L'ignorant" –

14. See also pages 329, 330, 349, 379, 428 *et passim*.

15. See Cabelguenne-Cazeaux.

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Je me tiens dans ma chambre et d'abord je me tais
 (le silence entre en serviteur mettre un peu d'ordre),
 et j'attends qu'un à un les mensonges s'écartent:
 que reste-t-il? que reste-t-il à ce mourant
 qui l'empêche si bien de mourir? Quelle force
 le fait encore parler entre ses quatre murs?
 Pourrais-je le savoir, moi l'ignare et l'inquiet?
 Mais je l'entends vraiment qui parle, et sa parole
 pénètre avec le jour ...
 (*Poésie 1946-1967* 63)

The poems of Hughes and of Jaccottet obviously have more than surface similarities and bear the comparison in depth as well. What could have been only superficial resemblances of subject matters actually indicate identical quests for revelation in the real, natural world, and a common conception of the simultaneous existence of two worlds, which poetry enables to see. Even further than this, there is a demonstrable coincidence of their theologies, although Hughes may be more loquacious and assertive in voicing his vision of the nameless deity. In both works too, the refusal of a permanent separation between words and things is a central issue, though in dealing with this question the poets tend to diverge, as Jaccottet seems to be extremely wary of a use of mythology which Hughes has always very readily accepted. But when all is said, although Jaccottet first seems to cover a narrower field, he does avoid the drawback that goes with Hughes' more accomplished achievement, which is to run the risk of heading into a "closed system" – "système clos (le poète entouré de quelques satellites : disciples, critiques, rares lecteurs)" (*L'entretien des muses* 306) – writing difficult poetry and being hardly able to "avoid being caught in a 'personnage' or playing a role, whether it is

official or not (including), worst of all, that of poet" (16) which Jaccottet is afraid could only reduce him to silence. On the other hand, one might think he rests content with planting "the seeds of a spiritual forest" (17) (*Une transaction secrète* 336) of which Hughes has already been mapping the "sacred geography" – "Sur la terre sont dispersés les ossements des dieux ; je ne veux ni les bafouer, ni les déterrer" (*Éléments d'un songe* 173).

16. "Alors que c'est dans la mesure même où l'on échappe à tout "personnage," à tout rôle, officiel ou non (y compris, surtout, celui de poète), que l'on peut espérer ne pas être réduit au silence" (*Une transaction secrète* 314).

17. "Des graines pour replanter la forêt spirituelle" (*Une transaction secrète* 336).

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